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SUBJECT: CHAD: ARCHBISHOP ON MUSLIM ATTACKS AND ON THE  
OPPOSITION

11. (SBU) Summary: In a meeting with the Ambassador March 1, Archbishop Ngartery said the anti-Danish-cartoons violent demonstration on February 11 had been an opportunity for Chadian Christians to show the path of peacefulness in not reacting. He said that the only way out of Chad's present political impasse was for France to persuade Deby to go into exile or delay the elections and promote a genuine national dialogue. In his view, the only northerner acceptable to southerners in the event of a transition was former president Goukouni Oueddai, while the only widely-respected southern oppositionist was General Kamougue. End summary.

12. (U) Ambassador Wall called on Chad's Catholic Archbishop Monseigneur Mathias Ngartery March 1. The Ambassador explained to the Archbishop that he had had numerous recent contacts with the Muslim community and did not want to appear to neglect the Christian community. The Ambassador praised the role of the church particularly in the field of education. He had visited Catholic schools the week before in Sarh (the Archbishop's home city). He and the Archbishop the previous morning had presided over the inauguration of new classrooms at the Cornelia Connely Center, a women's training project on the outskirts of Ndjamena.

13. (SBU) The Archbishop asked the Ambassador's perspective on relations with the Muslim community. The Ambassador said that he had been more optimistic before the demonstration of February 11 protesting the Danish cartoons, which had turned violent, but he still believed that the tendency of the Chadian Muslim culture favored peaceful coexistence. A few extremists had perverted what the demonstration's organizers had intended to be a peaceful protest of the cartoons. The Archbishop said that rioters had attacked Christians and their property, including churches. God had given the Christian community the opportunity to show the path of peace, by not reacting in kind. He said his church had sponsored dialogue with the Muslim community, and he had been pleased that some young Muslim participants had said that the violence had been un-Muslim. What perplexed him was that the government had not given an authorization for the demonstration. Yet the demonstrators set forth from the Grand Mosque with Sheikh Hissein Hassan Abakar, president of the Superior Council of Islamic Affairs, at the head, and the Minister of Interior had addressed them. The Archbishop said

that he had formally asked the government for an explanation but had received none.

¶4. (SBU) On the present political impasse, the Archbishop said that the central question was how to make Deby leave office without violence. Elections had now been announced for May 3, and without external pressure on Deby -- and with or without external electoral assistance -- he would run. Deby would prepare two or three candidates to run against him to give an impression of a campaign. The Ambassador observed that even if there existed a sudden willingness to have a proper election, time was too short now to prepare one. The Archbishop said it was incumbent on external players, the French specifically, to pressure Deby into exile or into at least standing down, but it was necessary to convince the French first. The Archbishop feared that without such pressure on Deby, the most likely scenario would be his violent overthrow.

¶5. (SBU) The Ambassador asked the Archbishop if he thought there existed an opposition figure who could rally the populace, whether the opposition parties could agree on such a candidate, and whether it might need to be a candidate from the North. The Archbishop said that, however much Arab states (for example, Sudan) might seek to impose an Arab as president in Chad, the populace would never accept an Arab president. Nor would the people of the South accept a relative of Deby (for example, the recently self-exiled Timan Erdimi); it was Deby and these relatives who had sunk Chad into its present mess and the populace rejected them all. According to the Archbishop, the only northerner who could gain popular acceptance as a transition leader would be former president Goukouni Oueddai (now in exile in Algeria), "a true nationalist." However, the Archbishop said, it was now important and necessary to have a southerner running the

country, if it were going to be saved, and most northerners realized as much. At the present juncture, he said, the one southerner who might be acceptable across the national spectrum was Wadal Abdelkader Kamougue (from Sarh). However, the Archbishop concluded, the opposition parties were unlikely to be able to agree on a single candidate, and in any case, General Kamougue could probably only serve as a transitional figure.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The Archbishop appears to be technically correct that there was no official written authorization for the anti-cartoon demonstration February 11, but the chief authorizing official, the Interior Minister, addressed the assembled masses, and police were prepositioned (if inadequately for a group of several thousand), so there was authorization de facto if not de jure. His views on the unifying role of former president Goukouni in a possible transition government are noteworthy, coming from a respected religious leader with deep roots in southern Chad. His opinion of the prospects of General Kamougue, one of the grand old men of Chadian politics whose glory days are seen to be behind him, is not widely shared.

WALL